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ABSTRACT

This summary report describes the three-year Special Emphasis Project, a large federal program directed at preventing and correcting reading difficulties among elementary school children. Section one of the report provides a brief history of the project, with descriptions of its rationale, intent, major and specific provisions, and the controlled experiment concept it follows. Section two provides a discussion of the similarities and differences found in the seven local projects that comprise the Special Emphasis Project. The distinguishing variables in this discussion are student types, teacher-staff characteristics, administration, curriculum, instructional materials, and program features. The third section of the report describes evaluations of the impact of the project on reading achievement, attitudes, and behavior. The fourth section provides short descriptions of the individual projects in California, Louisiana, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. (RL)

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# *What Kinds of Supplementary Intensive Reading Instruction Make a Difference?*

## A SPECIAL EMPHASIS REPORT FROM THE RIGHT TO READ PROGRAM

BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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We gratefully acknowledge all those who participated in the Special Emphasis Project, a national study, which grew out of Title VII, the National Reading Improvement Program.

Words of appreciation are in order for Eugene A. Jongsma of Southern Methodist University who authored the report. Special thanks are due to Helen O'Leary of the U.S. Department of Education who administered the project under the Right To Read Program and to Lorraine Mercier of the same Department who served as the program officer during the final phase of preparing information from the project for dissemination.

Special recognition is due also to Dingle Associates, Inc. who prepared this document pursuant to Contract No. 300-80-0730. The findings, observations and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement of the projects, practices or products in this publication should be inferred.

The project profiles assembled here were extrapolated from a final report entitled, "Evaluation Of The Right To Read Special Emphasis Program."

The U.S. Department of Education has a long history of offering leadership to local educational agencies interested in improving their instructional programs. One of the chief commitments has been to develop more effective literacy programs, particularly for children who are less fortunate or academically deficient. It is within this context that the Special Emphasis Project was initiated.

The Special Emphasis Project grew out of Title VII, the National Reading Improvement Program. Essentially, Special Emphasis was a national study to test the hypothesis that intensive programs of reading instruction, introduced at an early age, can change the patterns of student reading achievement in schools having large numbers of students reading one or more grades below level. Unlike many intervention programs, Special Emphasis was to have a preventive focus, with emphasis on grades 1 and 2.

Seven independent projects were closely monitored for a period of 3 years. Although the projects differed in the way they were organized and in the methods used, they all shared the same basic goals. It is my hope that by sharing the experiences gained through Special Emphasis, teachers and administrators may acquire insights into how they might strengthen their own local reading programs.

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Summary Report

of the

Special Emphasis Project

Teachers and Administrators who are interested in improving their local reading programs may find several useful suggestions in the knowledge gained from the Special Emphasis Project. The Special Emphasis Project was a large Federal program directed at preventing and correcting reading difficulties among elementary school-age children. It required the combined efforts of hundreds of educators and the participation of over 10,000 children and their parents for a 3-year period. This Summary Report will give a brief history of the Special Emphasis Project. Next, the results of an extensive evaluation of these projects will be summarized. Finally, short descriptions will be given for each of the seven projects implemented around the country.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## Rationale and Intent

The Right to Read Special Emphasis Project was initiated in 1976 under the provisions of the Title VII National Reading Improvement Act (Public Law 94-380, Section 721, as amended by Public Law 94-194, Section 10). The underlying rationale was that intensive programs of reading instruction, conducted by reading specialists in cooperation with classroom teachers, can change the patterns of student reading achievement in schools having large numbers of students reading one or more grades below level.

Unlike many Federal intervention programs which are remedial in nature (e.g., Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), the Special Emphasis Project had a preventive focus. Schools involved in the project took a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to reading instruction with all students in grades 1 and 2 and provided remedial instruction to students in grades 3 through 6 who were reading below level.

## Major Provisions

The major requirements of the Special Emphasis Project included:

- Teaching of reading by reading specialists for all children in grades 1 and 2.
- Teaching of reading by reading specialists for children in grades 3 through 6, who have reading problems (i.e., are achieving 1 or more years below grade level).

- An intensive vacation reading program for children reading below grade level or experiencing problems in learning to read.

It should be noted that a "reading specialist" was defined as an individual who has a master's degree in reading and has successfully completed 3 years of teaching.

Specific Provisions

In addition to the major provisions listed above, the Special Emphasis Project called for 14 specific features. It was believed that these features, if followed, would enhance project effectiveness. The features are:

- Diagnostic testing designated to identify pre-elementary and elementary school children with reading deficiencies, including the identification of conditions which, without appropriate other treatment, can be expected to impede or prevent children from learning to read.
- Planning for and establishing a comprehensive reading program.
- Reading instruction for elementary school pupils whose reading achievement is less than that which would normally be expected for pupils of comparable ages and in comparable grades.
- Preservice training programs for teaching personnel, including teacher-aides and other ancillary educational personnel, and inservice training and development programs, where feasible, designed to enable such personnel to improve their ability to teach students to read to the extent practicable.
- Participation of the school faculty, school board members, administration, parents, and students in reading-related activities which stimulate an interest in reading and are conducive to improving reading skills.
- Parent participation in developing and implementing the program for which assistance is sought.
- Local educational agency school board participation in developing programs.

- Periodic testing in programs for elementary school children on a sufficiently frequent basis to measure accurately reading achievement; for programs for pre-elementary school children, a test of reading proficiency at the conclusion, minimally, of the first-grade program into which the nursery and kindergarten programs are integrated.

- Publishing reading achievement test results by grade level and, where appropriate, by school, without identification of achievement of individual children.

- Availability of reading achievement test results on an individual basis to parents or guardians of any child being so tested.

- Participation on an equitable basis by children enrolled in nonprofit private elementary schools in the area to be served (after consultation with the appropriate private school officials) to an extent consistent with the number of such children whose educational needs are of the kind the program is intended to meet.

- The use of bilingual educational methods and techniques to the extent consistent with the number of elementary school-age children in the area served by a reading program who are of limited English-speaking ability.

- Appropriate involvement of leaders of the cultural and educational resources of the areas to be served, including institutions of higher education, nonprofit private schools, public and private nonprofit agencies such as libraries, museums, educational radio and television, and other cultural and educational resources of the community (to the extent practicable).

- Assessment, evaluation, and collection of information on individual children by teachers during each year of the pre-elementary program, to be made available for teachers in the subsequent year, so that continuity for the individual child is not lost.

## The Controlled Experiment Concept

In planning for implementing and evaluating the Special Emphasis Project, the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) sought to use a controlled experiment approach. That is, each school which implemented a Special Emphasis program, or "treatment," would be matched with a "comparison" school in the same

district. The "project" and "comparison" schools were to be similar with respect to:

- Instructional approaches
- Curriculum materials
- Size of enrollment
- Student characteristics (i.e., Socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and average scores on standardized tests)

If the matching was successfully adhered to, evaluators would get a more accurate assessment of the effects of the Special Emphasis provisions.

Summary

All local education agencies participating in the Special Emphasis Project would be required to assure that:

- all first-and second-graders would receive intensive reading instruction (i.e., a minimum of 40 minutes per day);
- all students in grades 3 through 6 who have reading problems would be given intensive instruction in reading;
- an intensive summer program would be available for the project school students who are performing below grade level, and this service not be available to the comparison school children;
- instructional plans would be formulated through consultations with many parties, including the district administration, parents, and faculty of the project school, and that this plan would include a diagnostic-prescriptive approach and be part of a comprehensive reading program in the project school; and
- cooperation be extended with an external evaluation to be conducted by the commissioner or his/her contractor.

In response to the request for proposal, 50 applications were received. Of these, 8 were selected for funding. Each received between $100,000 and $200,000 per year. The project was scheduled to run for 3 consecutive school years---1976-77, 1977-78, and 1978-79.

Two of the original projects were dropped and a new one was added, resulting in seven projects that were closely monitored. These seven were located in California, Louisiana, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia.

## II. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES FOUND IN LOCAL PROJECTS

While it is informative to examine each Special Emphasis Project individually, additional lessons may be learned by noting similarities and differences across all the projects. In this section, an effort will be made to summarize the projects. The summary will be organized into (1) types of students served; (2) characteristics of teachers and staff; (3) curriculum, materials, and program features; (4) implementation of Special Emphasis provisions; and (5) administration.

### Types of Students Served

Students involved in the projects were almost equally split between boys and girls. Males comprised 52 percent of the Special Emphasis students and 50 percent of the students in the comparison schools.

Racial/ethnic minorities were strongly represented. Blacks comprised 45 percent, Hispanics 11 percent, and whites 43 percent of the Special Emphasis schools. Their comparison school counterparts were 43 percent black, 9 percent Hispanic, and 47 percent white.

Socioeconomic level was estimated through the number of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches. Because voluntary enrollment is permitted in subsidized food programs, this is not a completely reliable index of SES level, but it does provide a rough estimate. The proportion of low SES students ranged from 39 percent in Texas to 81 percent in

Michigan and Tennessee. In most projects, over 50 percent of the students came from low SES or poor homes.

Two other characteristics were mobility and absenteeism. Students missing 25 percent or more of the school year ranged from 1 percent in Louisiana to 11 percent in Ohio. The project evaluator found that the combined factors of absenteeism and student transfers accounted for significant sample attrition.

Characteristics of Teachers and Staff

Most classroom teachers had over 6 years of teaching experience. For example, for project year 1977-78, 67 percent of the project school teachers and 61 percent of comparison school teachers had 6 or more years of experience. During the following year, the balance shifted in favor of the project schools. So overall, teachers at the project schools had more experience than their counterparts. It should also be pointed out that the more experienced teachers were also less recently trained and may have had less exposure to recently developed methods of teaching reading. Overall, about 39 percent of the Special Emphasis school teachers had graduate degrees compared to 31 percent of the comparison school teachers.

With the exception of those in Ohio, reading specialists were veteran teachers. However, most had limited experience in the role of reading specialist. Special Emphasis, together with increasingly stringent State requirements for reading instruction, may have been

responsible for many of these teachers being employed as reading specialists.

Teachers were surveyed to determine whether they were inclined to be "diagnostic-prescriptive" in their approach to teaching, or whether they were inclined to take a "whole-class" approach. Similary, the survey sought to find out whether teaching methods tended to be "structured" or "flexible."

In most instances, the general orientation of teachers in the project and comparison schools was similar. Few teachers used a whole-class approach, and few teachers could be classified as flexible.

Curriculum, Materials, and Program Features

Teaching materials used across projects and within projects were generally similar. The basal reading series was the mainstay of every program. In conjunction with the basal text, skill activities--both published and teacher-developed--were major resources. Teachers and school administrators credited Special Emphasis with having increased the variety and amount of hardware and software in general use. Utilization of these items varied from project to project.

All Special Emphasis projects established skill mastery recordkeeping systems for tracking student progress in reading skills and charting the diagnostic-prescriptive approach. In California, for example, the system in the basal reading series was used. In other projects, commercial

reading management systems (e.g., Wisconsin Design) were used; and in some projects, locally devised district-wide systems were used. In many cases, these management systems were in place before the Special Emphasis project began. Generally, management systems were more commonly used on the first and second grade levels than at grades 3 through 6.

Although the settings and groupings in which reading specialists worked varied, instructional materials used by these specialists tended to follow a general pattern. Specialists conducting the basic reading instruction relied on a basal series, as did the regular classroom teachers. Specialists providing remedial instruction relied upon teacher-developed as well as commercial skill activities and instructional kits.

Reading specialists were deployed in three basic ways. First, in some projects, all children came to the specialist's classroom for Special Emphasis instruction. In some of these cases, the classroom teacher accompanied the children and assisted with instruction, while in other cases the specialist and aide took sole responsibility. A second pattern was for the specialist to offer nearly all instruction in the regular classrooms, by moving from class to class. Again, sometimes the classroom teacher coordinated her teaching with the specialist; in other situations, the specialist conducted individual or small group instruction independently of the teacher. A third approach represented a compromise of the first two: The specialist served all first- and second-graders in the regular classroom, usually during the morning hours. Then in the afternoon, students in grades 3 through 6

who were having reading problems, came individually or in small groups to the specialist's lab/classroom to receive supplemental instruction.

All projects offered a summer program of intensive reading instruction. On the average, these programs served slightly more than one-third of the eligible students. Some of the more distinctive summer program features were field trips followed by language experience exercises related to reading instruction, inexpensive book distributions, and gym and library activities integrated into the reading curriculum.

## Implementation of the Special Emphasis Provisions

Each project was examined to determine to what extent it complied with the original USOE guidelines cited earlier in this report. For various reasons, many of which were beyond the control of project officials, not all projects were able to adhere to the guidelines. Listed below is a brief summary of the implementation of the major provisions:

- All projects employed reading specialists or reading teachers:
- Special Emphasis instruction was provided to all first and second grade students in each project except two. Instruction for students in grades 3 through 6 who were 1 or more years below level was provided in all projects except one, which, because of numbers, agreed to serve the lowest achieving 20 percent.
- The minimum 40-minute requirement per day of reading instruction was met by all projects but one.
- All projects designed and implemented summer reading programs.

- Preservice training for teacher and clerical aides and inservice training for Special Emphasis staff and teachers were held in all projects.

- Only four of the seven projects engaged in broad-based planning. Planning at the remaining three projects was limited to school officials and teachers. Only one project actively involved parents.

- All projects implemented a diagnostic-prescriptive approach through the use of skill mastery recordkeeping systems.

- In only one project were the comparison and project schools truly comparable. For five projects, they were generally comparable, and in one project, they lacked comparability.

Administration

Project administration involved different combinations of personnel at each location. Although the project directors represented a diverse group, all seven had many years of experience in education and were in recognized leadership positions in their districts.

Four project directors were located offsite in their school district's administrative offices. In general, these directors provided less supervision of project personnel and less guidance for program implementation. Responsibility was typically assigned to an individual located at the project school. The remaining three project directors were located at their project schools. Teachers and specialists agreed that these directors assumed an active role, made frequent visits to Special Emphasis classes, and generally had greater supervisory presence. The time devoted by project directors to Special Emphasis ranged from 5 to 40 hours per week, depending upon the additional duties assigned to the director.

Project directors were responsible for establishing positive, cooperative relationships with the schools involved in the study. These proved to be a particularly sensitive issue for the comparison schools which received none of the programmatic benefits of Special Emphasis yet were burdened by the semiannual testing and data gathering. Positive relationships existed at three projects. At the other four locations, resistance to the project staff was evident, and, in some cases, teachers at the comparison schools refused to cooperate with various aspects of the study.

Administrative support from the local districts for the Special Emphasis project was not strong in all locations, despite the fact that the districts had voluntarily sought Special Emphasis funds. Although there was general interest expressed in the project and in improving reading instruction, Special Emphasis was clearly not a local district priority at many of the locations.

## III. EVALUATION OF THE SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROJECT

Evaluation was an important part of the Special Emphasis Project. The U.S. Office of Education contracted with an outside evaluator to carefully monitor and assess the effectiveness of the programs. General Research Corporation (GRC) was the agency primarily responsible for conducting the evaluation. GRC's evaluation design examined two types of evaluation---process evaluation and impact evaluation.

The process evaluation component was directed at examining the process of implementing and delivering the Special Emphasis Program. More specifically, the evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

- To what degree did project sites adhere to the Special Emphasis guidelines?
- How comparable were the Special Emphasis Schools and students to the "comparison" schools and students?
- What were the characteristics of the Special Emphasis programs that were implemented?

These questions were answered from data and information collected from classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews.

Unlike process evaluation, product evaluation focused on the short and long term effects of the program. It sought to answer the following questions:

- What impact did the Special Emphasis programs have on student reading achievement?

- What impact did the Special Emphasis programs have on reading-related attitudes and behaviors of staff, students, and parents?
- What carryover effects did the Special Emphasis programs have within each participating school district?

These questions were answered through standardized reading tests, more specifically the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, as well as through questionnaires, interviews, and observation.

Since the results of process evaluation were discussed under "Implementation of the Special Emphasis Provisions," the following discussion will focus only on product evaluation. It has been organized into three subsections: 1) impact on reading achievement; 2) impact on attitudes and behavior; and 3) carryover effects.

## Impact on Reading Achievement

A variety of questionnaires, checklists, and tests were used to evaluate the effects of the Special Emphasis Project. But the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) was the major instrument used for assessing changes in student reading achievement.

The SDRT series was chosen for the following reasons:

- It permits evaluation of individual and group strengths and weaknesses on specific skills and thus seemed appropriate for Special Emphasis' diagnostic approach to reading.

- It facilitates tracking student progress on specific skills through all the elementary grades, thus yielding skill scores which are comparable across grades.

- It was a relatively new test at the time the study began, therefore, it was unlikely that teacher familiarity with the test would allow "teaching to test."

As the study progressed, it became obvious that the SDRT may not have been an appropriate evaluation instrument--for this project--for a couple of important reasons:

- The project called for compiling and analyzing achievement scores. The SDRT is not truly an achievement test.

- The SDRT was intentionally designed for low-achieving students, therefore, the items tend to be easier so such students can experience some success. Ceiling effects occur when a test is too easy for the students taking it, and serious ceiling effects were encountered in this project. In practical terms, this means that in many instances the resulting scores were underestimates of the students' true scores.

In spite of these technical problems, the SDRT was used throughout the project. It was administered by classroom teachers every fall and spring of the three project years (1976-77, 1977-78, 1978-79). The administrations were supervised by representatives of the external evaluation agency.

The measure selected to assess achievement was the "comprehension total" score on the SDRT. This score was chosen because (1) it is common to all levels of the test; and (2) it came closer to representing a measure of achievement rather than a diagnosis of a skill.

The impact of Special Emphasis on reading achievement was examined in three ways: by comparing the SDRT scores for all project and comparison students who took the pretests and posttests; by doing a similar comparison but only for students scoring below the mean, or average; and by charting a trend analysis of students reading 1 or more years below grade level. Following is an explanation of each.

Total Comparisons. This procedure consisted of comparing all Special Emphasis students with all comparison students within each grade, at each school, for whom both pretest and posttest scores were available.

Because the Special Emphasis and comparison groups were frequently not equivalent, a statistical procedure known as analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used. In a sense, this procedure mathematically adjusts for initial differences (pretest scores) between groups while testing for differences in outcomes (posttest scores).

Three of the seven projects found significant differences favoring the Special Emphasis groups. Louisiana and Texas both had a pattern of significant differences for grades 2 and 5 but not for the other grades. At neither of these locations was there any evidence that the Special Emphasis program for grade 2 or grade 5 was different than that offered at other grade levels. In West Virginia, only the fourth-graders in Special Emphasis scored significantly higher than their counterparts. In four projects (California, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee), no significant differences were found between the Special Emphasis and comparison groups.

Below Mean Comparisons. The second way of asssessing the impact of Special Emphasis on reading achievement was to look only at those students who scored below the mean for their grade in their particular schools. This type of analysis had two advantages. First, it focused directly on those students for whom the Special Emphasis project was intended. Second, it was likely to avoid the problems related to ceiling effects, mentioned earlier, since these students were not likely to hit the test ceiling.

The same statistical procedure used for total comparisons was used for below mean comparisons. That is, the average posttest scores of the below mean Special Emphasis students were compared to the average posttest scores of the comparison students, after equating the groups on pretest scores.

The impact of Special Emphasis instruction proved to be more significant when judged in terms of the below average students. Five of the seven projects showed at least some significant differences favoring the Special Emphasis groups. Louisiana had the most consistent pattern, where Special Emphasis students in grades 2, 4, 5, and 6 outscored their counterparts. West Virginia found differences in grades 4 and 5; Texas in grade 2; Ohio in grade 6; and California in grade 4. Two of the projects, Tennessee and Michigan, did not find Special Emphasis to have any greater impact on reading achievement than their comparison programs.

Trend Analysis. A third approach to evaluating the impact on achievement was to examine trends in the percentage of students reading 1

or more years below grade level, from the spring of 1977 to the spring of 1979.

The results indicate that, in most of the projects, the total percentage of students reading 1 or more years below grade level either decreased or held steady from 1977 to 1978 and from 1978 to 1979 for both the Special Emphasis and comparison schools. Only in Louisiana did the Special Emphasis group not fall below level as much as did the comparison group. In general, the Special Emphasis project did little to reverse the tide of students scoring below grade level. Overall, about one-fifth to one-third of the students continued to achieve 1 or more years below grade level.

Impact on Attitudes and Behavior

In addition to evaluating the impact of Special Emphasis on reading achievement, changes in attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers, students, and parents were also examined.

Attitudes of Teachers. Extensive questionnaires were administered to all teachers from each project for both the 1977-78 and 1978-79 project years. Data were collected regarding:

- Attitudes of students, teachers, and the principal
- Reading behaviors of students
- Problems resulting from involvement in the Special Emphasis Project

Comparisons were made between responses for the project years to determine if teachers perceived changes in (1) the principal's attitude toward the reading program; (2) the students' attitudes toward reading; and (3) fellow teachers' attitudes toward reading instruction. Similar comparisons were made regarding perceived changes in student behaviors in (1) the time spent reading in class; (2) the time spent reading outside class; and (3) library and/or classroom book usage.

For each project year, teachers were also asked to categorize potential problem areas as major, minor, or not a problem. Responses were compared across years to see whether the magnitude of the problems had changed.

Attitudes of Students. Two project-developed questionnaires were administered to students, one to third-graders and one to fourth- through sixth-graders.

For third-graders, comparisons were made between the proportion of Special Emphasis students and comparison students who responded that (1) reading was fun; (2) they read during their free time; (3) they enjoyed reading in class; and (4) they read only when they had to.

Similar comparisons were made for fourth through sixth grade student responses on (1) whether they liked to read; (2) whether they thought they read better than the previous year; (3) the amount of time spent reading outside of school; and (4) the number of books read in the past month.

Attitudes of Parents. Parent questionnaires were administered and tabulated for each year at each project. Comparisons were made between the proportion of Special Emphasis parents and comparison parents who responded regarding whether (1) their child shared books that he/she read with other family members; (2) the school set up parent-teacher conferences to explain their child's strengths or weaknesses in reading; and (3) they had worked as volunteers in their child's school during the previous year.

Attitudinal and Behavioral Findings. Although differences existed among projects, the following findings when viewed collectively, summarize the results of the surveys:

- The majority of Special Emphasis and comparison teachers perceived improved student attitudes and behaviors in 1978. The extent of improvement, however, dropped in 1979.
- No consistent pattern was observed of teachers' perception of their colleagues' attitudes regarding reading.
- Many teachers either declined to comment or professed a lack of knowledge regarding their school principal's attitudes toward reading.
- Teacher problems with Special Emphasis seemed to peak in 1978 and subside in 1979. For teachers in the Special Emphasis schools, these problems were generally associated with an overemphasis on reading to the detriment of other subjects. Comparison school teachers, on the other hand, resented the extra work which Special Emphasis imposed when they received no program benefits.
- Attitudes regarding reading and reading-related behaviors expressed by students and parents were similar in both project and comparison schools.

## Carryover Effects

Often in Federally funded experimental on demonstration programs, little or no evidence of the program or the changes it was intended to introduce remains after Federal funding ends. Therefore, the continuation of a program after termination of Federal funding may be regarded as one of the best indicators of program success.

To determine the extent to which Special Emphasis had effected change, teachers were asked in the spring of 1979 what changes they had perceived in attitudes and what programmatic changes would remain after the Special Emphasis project was over. Then, in the fall of 1979, after the project had ended, personnel at each location were questioned regarding tangible, carryover effects of Special Emphasis.

On every level--district, school, classroom, and home--the kinds of institutionalized carryover from Special Emphasis varied widely. Opinions also varied on how certain the carryover effects would be.

What factors or combination of factors influenced institutionalization or carryover? Based on the results of surveys, interviews, and observation, the following factors seemed to be the key determinants to carryover:

- A district official took responsibility for the design and regular supervision of the project and also for making improvement in the system after the project ended. Thus, a combination of leadership and continuity from the central office was present.

- The project had specific objectives and special strategies designed to meet objectives. In other words, there was a uniqueness to the project and not merely a "more of the same" attitude. More specifically, the prominent approaches were (1) placing the reading specialist in the regular classroom; (2) designating the specialist as a resource for the classroom teacher with time set aside for conferences; and (3) skills assessment with specific provisions for skill-building to achieve goals.

- Symbols of success were also important. During the 3-year project, teachers and administrators needed to see signs of progress and accomplishment, such as positive test score results, more parent involvement, or improved teacher morale and enthusiasm.

- Teachers had a feeling of ownership in the project. Regardless of whether the design and initiation of the project came from the district office, the teachers and specialists needed to make a creative input to the project and have a sense that their concerns and problems were heard.

## IV. DESCRIPTION OF INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

A total of seven individual projects were monitored during the Special Emphasis Project. Although all of the projects were to comply with the USOE Special Emphasis guidelines and share, to a large extent, the same common diagnostic-prescriptive philosophy, the projects differed in many respects, such as administration, organization, curriculum, and materials. A thumbnail description is given for each of the projects, and an attempt is made to highlight the distinguishing features of each. The titles of the projects and the names of participating schools can be found in the appendix to this report.

### California

California was the last Special Emphasis Project to be funded. It was initiated in 1977, after two of the original sites were not refunded and, consequently, operated for only 2 years---1977-78 and 1978-79.

The California project involved two schools---the Special Emphasis, or project school, and the comparison school. Both schools were located in a predominantly blue-collar economic area in a large city. The area was relatively stable and had little student turnover. The overwhelming majority of the students were black (approximately 75 percent to 85 percent), with a small number of white, Hispanic, and Asian students. Over 50 percent of the students received free or reduced-price lunches.

Both the project school and comparison school received Title I services. A Title I reading specialist was assigned to each school and conducted similar programs. However, 11 Title I aides served the project school and only one served the comparison school.

The project was directed by the reading supervisor of both the project and comparison schools. She was responsible for supervising the regular reading program as well as the Title I program. She was housed in the project school along with a full-time secretary who provided clerical and administrative assistance.

In addition to the project director, two reading specialists, one reading teacher, and one full-time aide were employed by the Special Emphasis Project. The two reading specialists were responsible for selecting objectives for individual students, instruction, testing and assessment, and training aides. In collaboration with the project director, they planned and conducted inservice training and participated in making decisions regarding the basic approach to reading instruction.

Although they would occasionally visit the regular classroom, the reading specialists taught predominantly in a classroom/lab designated for Special Emphasis instruction. First- and second-graders received 1 hour per day of reading instruction from reading specialists. During the first year of the project, only 35 percent to 50 percent of the first- and second-graders received Special Emphasis instruction. This was expanded to 100 percent the second year to comply with USOE guidelines.

Students reading below grade level in grades 3 through 6 reported to the specialists' room daily to receive 30 minutes of small group instruction.

The basic reading program in both schools was similar. Teachers used the Lippincott and Holt, Rinehart, Winston basal reading series. The Lippincott skill mastery recordkeeping system was used as a management system for all students in both schools. In addition, the reading specialists used a variety of audiovisual kits, programmed materials, games, workbooks, learning centers, and interest centers. Coordination and planning between the specialists and classroom teachers took place on a weekly basis.

A 15-day summer program was designed and conducted by the project director, three reading specialists, and two aides. Approximately 40 children attended class 3 hours each day. The program consisted of two 75-minute instructional periods---one for structured reading activities and the other for interdisciplinary language arts activities, separated by a 30-minute break between periods.

A Title I summer reading clinic operated simultaneously with the Special Emphasis Summer program. Many students from the comparison school participated in the Title I summer program.

The inservice training program was designed and conducted by the project director and one of the reading specialists. It consisted of instruction in curriculum development, diagnostic-prescriptive teaching, individualized instruction, reading in the content areas, preparation of support materials, and reading assessment.

In summary, the Special Emphasis guidelines were never fully implemented in the California project. Because of the mix of many aspects of the Title I and Special Emphasis programs, it was difficult to determine what was unique to the Special Emphasis program.

Louisiana

The Louisiana project was located in a rural area that was experiencing change. Because of employment opportunities, there was an influx of itinerant workers as well as some professionals. Still, the school population remained relatively stable, but poor.

Four schools were involved in the Special Emphasis project---two project schools and two comparison schools. One project school served grades 1 through 3 while the other school served grades 4 through 8. The two comparison schools were similarly divided. Slightly more than half of the students were black and approximately 50 percent of all the students received free or reduced-price lunches. Although students in the project and comparison schools were quite similar in demographic characteristics, the comparison group (N=700) was more than twice as large as the project group (N=300).

Title I services were offered in all four schools. Students who qualified received up to 45 minutes per day of extra reading instruction. In the project schools, this extra assistance was coordinated with the regular classroom program. However, this coordination did not take place in the comparison schools.

The project director administered the Title I program as well as the Special Emphasis project but was not a full-time employee of the school district. Also assigned to the project were three reading specialists. Each specialist served two grade levels, 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6. One aide assisted each specialist.

The Louisiana project's major goal was to increase the percentage of students reading at grade level from 14 percent to 50 percent, based on the California Test of Basic Skills. The school district exceeded the expectations of USOE by including virtually all students in grades 1 through 6 in the project schools.

Special Emphasis instruction took place in the reading specialist's lab-type classroom with the specialist, classroom teacher, and aide present. Classes, averaging 25 students, were brought to the reading room and divided into groups according to reading ability and skill needs. Each group then rotated through a series of activities. In general, the reading specialist conducted instruction, the classroom teacher provided followup and practice activities, and the aide supervised oral reading or independent work.

During the project's first year (1976-77), both the Special Emphasis program and the Title I program used the Precision Teaching System, a locally developed skills management system. However, in the project's second and third years, the Precision Teaching System was used exclusively with Title I students while the Houghton Mifflin basal reading series, along with published and teacher-developed skill activities, was used with Special Emphasis students.

A 20-day summer program served over half of the project schools' total enrollment. Classes were taught by four reading specialists with four regular classroom teachers serving as aides. Each student received 50 minutes of reading instruction, a 10-minute recreational break, and a 50-minute period of library, arts, crafts, and films. Reading materials used during the academic year were also used in the summer program.

Inservice training consisted of a series of practical, site-specific programs. The focus of the training was on analyzing the adopted basal reading series (Houghton Mifflin) to determine its appropriateness for the student population. During the first project year, a local university recognized these sessions as an extension course and offered participants 3 semester hours of credit.

The Louisiana project complied more with the original USOE guidelines than many other projects. Two distinctive project features were (1) the close working relationship between specialists and classroom teachers; and (2) the effort to customize the basal reading series to serve the needs of local students.

Michigan

This project was located in an independent city within the boundaries of a large metropolitan area. Like those of many urban areas, this district faced problems such as frequent turnover of top administrators, budget cutbacks, teacher cutbacks, and a transient student population. As a consequence, the district had sought and received a wide variety of Federal programs.

One project school and one comparison school were involved in the project. For the first 2 project years, these schools served grades K through 6. Because of a reorganization plan, both schools were reduced to K through 5 for the third project year. Students at the two schools had very similar characteristics. Nearly all students were black (96 percent to 99 percent) with 1 percent or less white and 3 percent or less of other minorities. Well over 75 percent of the students received free or reduced-price lunches. Both schools offered Title I services.

The project was directed by a central office administrator who had many other responsibilities. Consequently, the head reading specialist assumed much of the onsite leadership. The project employed five reading specialists and six aides. The five reading specialists were each assigned specific grade levels; two worked with first and second grades and one served each of the remaining third, fourth, and fifth grades.

In the first and second grades, the reading specialists worked in the regular classroom with the classroom teacher present. During the 70-minute reading period, student groups rotated between the specialist, classroom teacher, and aide. In general, the classroom teacher conducted the basal reader program, while the specialist provided enrichment and skill reinforcement activities.

In the third through fifth grades, students were pulled out of their regular classrooms to receive small group instruction in the specialist's room. Frequency of attendance varied with the students' degrees of reading difficulty; i.e., students having the most severe reading problems attended more frequently.

The instructional program relied heavily on the basal reading series (K-3, Bank Street Readers; 4-5, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, and Houghton Mifflin; 6, Holt, Rinehart, Winston). The same basal series were used in both the project and comparison schools. However, a locally developed skills management system was incorporated into the Special Emphasis program and not the comparison school's program.

The summer program, in 1978, ran for 17 days and consisted of 160 minutes of reading instruction or reading-related activities followed by a 20-minute supervised lunch. The program was staffed by four reading specialists, five teachers, and nine paraprofessionals. Students were organized into small groups and instruction was informal, utilizing teacher-made materials, paperbacks, filmstrips, and student-made books. Basal readers were not used. The following summer, 1979, the program's length was increased to 20 days, the staff reduced, and the instructional approach made more formal by using the same materials used during the school year.

Inservice training was conducted by the project director, the specialists, and an outside consultant, and college credit was given for some sessions. Probably because participation was voluntary, fewer than half of the teachers attended the training sessions.

In summary, the Special Emphasis propram was not truly "special." The role of the reading specialists in this project seemed to lean more toward implementing the regular developmental reading program. Thus, opportunities to employ expertise and creativity were limited somewhat by the prescribed basal programs.

Ohio

The Ohio project was located in a downtown fringe area of a large industrial city, and the two elementary schools that were involved were located less than 1 mile from each other. The project and comparison schools were well matched in terms of size and student characteristics. Nearly 90 percent of the students were white and less than 1 percent were black. Over two-thirds received free or reduced-price lunches. Neither school received Title I funds. The project school was a modern building with ample special services, but the comparison school was in an old building with fewer services and materials.

A number of problems beyond the control of project personnel plagued the Special Emphasis Project. District-wide budgetary problems, a teacher strike, staff reassignments, and lack of staff continuity hampered the project's effectiveness. As a result, the Ohio project was dropped from the evaluation after approximately 2 years.

A full-time project director with no other regularly assigned responsibilities administered the project. She received the services of a full-time secretary. Two reading teachers were hired but neither had graduate degrees specializing in reading, as recommended by USOE. Three aides also participated in the program.

Each reading teacher was located in a classroom imaginatively organized into various learning centers. First- and second-graders came to the classroom each morning. After 20 minutes of group instruction,

students were assigned to particular learning stations for 20 minutes of independent or small group reinforcement activities. In the afternoon, third- through sixth-graders came in groups of 10 to 12. They were selected on the basis of their skill deficiencies. Each student participating in Special Emphasis returned to his or her classroom with a daily followup activity.

Special Emphasis instruction focused on a language experience approach to reading. Special attention was directed toward expanding the student's minimal language facility. Except for Special Emphasis, the reading programs at the project and comparison schools were similar. Both schools used the Houghton Mifflin basal series for grades 1 through 3, the Harcourt Brace series for grades 4 through 6, and a district-wide management system to monitor student progress.

The summer program ran for 3 hours a day for 4 weeks. It was staffed by two reading specialists and four aides. Approximately one-fourth of the project school students attended. Instructionally, the specialist relied more heavily on materials which they developed themselves, such as individualized reading kits and creative writing kits.

Up to 4 hours a month was spent in inservice training. Sessions were planned and conducted by the project director and one of the Special Emphasis reading teachers.

The strengths of the Ohio project were the central office leadership, the creativity of the two reading teachers, and the unifying focus of the language experience approach to reading instruction. Unfortunately, because of the problems mentioned earlier, the project was never able to reach its full potential.

Tennessee

This project was located in the rural outskirts of a metropolitan area which was undergoing change and expansion as new families moved into the community as a result of urban sprawl. The school district was experiencing rapid growth.

The comparison school served grades K through 8 but only grades 1 through 6 were used in the study. It was housed in a traditional structure, had a traditionally structured education program, and was organized into self-contained classrooms. The project school also served grades K through 8 but was located in a new building featuring an open space environment. Both schools received Title I services.

Although students in the two schools came from the same geographical area, there were significant differences between the two student bodies. The project school was approximately 75 percent black and 25 percent white, while the comparison school was nearly 50 percent-50 percent in racial composition. A high percentage of students from both schools came from economically deprived homes. The project school staff was larger in

size and had twice as much teaching experience as their counterparts in the comparison school. In short, the two schools weren't as closely mated as USOE would have liked.

In addition to the director, the project staff consisted of three reading specialists, three aides, and one clerical aide. One specialist served grades 1 and 2; the remaining two served grades 3 through 6.

Initially, the reading specialists provided intensive reading instruction in their own rooms, independently of the classroom teachers. Midway through the first year, it was decided that the specialists' services would be more effective if they were closely coordinated with classroom teachers. Thus, a change in organization was made that continued throughout the project.

Reading specialists and aides worked in pairs. During the morning, they moved from classroom to classroom to work with each class during its regularly scheduled reading period. In the afternoon, small groups of students reported to the specialists' classrooms where they received corrective instruction in specific skills.

Mastery of reading skills was tracked for each student in the Special Emphasis classes. Two recordkeeping systems were used. Overall progress was assessed by Individual Criterion Reference Tests (Educational Development Corporation). In addition, the criterion-referenced tests

which accompany the Houghton Mifflin program were also used. The two major instructional programs that were used were the DISTAR program and the Houghton Mifflin basal reading series.

The summer program lasted 4 weeks. For 4 days a week, the students received approximately 3 hours of morning reading instruction and a 30-minute afternoon reading period. Fridays were activity days usually reserved for field trips, and events on activity days were later incorporated into the language experience part of classroom instruction. Two special features of the summer program were parent involvement activities and a paperback book distribution program.

The project director, reading specialist, and principal collaborated on designing and conducting the inservice training program. In addition, a weekly course was taught by an outside consultant.

The strenths of the Tennessee project were strong administrative leadership, broad-based planning, close coordination between specialist and classroom teachers, and active parent involvement.

Texas

The Texas project site was located on the outskirts of a large urban area which in recent years had experienced rapid growth, and a dramatic increase in student population.

The two schools that were used served grades K through 5, and the physical facilities of the schools were similiar. Both buildings were large, modern structures with self-contained classrooms. The comparison school had more students and, consequently, more teachers. In all other respects, however, the schools, students, and teachers were very similar. A large number of students, between 40 percent to 50 percent, were Hispanic. A similar number were white, and the balance (5 percent to 10 percent) were black. Nearly half of the students received free or reduced-price lunches. This was the only Special Emphasis site requiring bilingual materials and resources. Both schools received Title I services.

The project was directed by a school district reading supervisor who also had numerous other responsibilities. Therefore, the day-to-day coordination of project activities was provided by the lead reading specialist. The project team consisted of six reading specialists, five aides, and one clerk.

The roles served by the reading specialists seemed to vary with grade levels. In grades 1 and 2, the specialists worked cooperatively with the classroom teacher in planning instruction, grouping students, selecting materials, and conducting activities. The specialist, with an aide, worked alongside the classroom teacher during the regular reading period. In addition, they returned to the classroom in the afternoon to work with individuals or a small group of students to reinforce learning. Students in grades 3 through 5 left their regular classrooms

to attend small group sessions in the specialists' lab-type classroom. Instruction was aimed at correcting skill deficiencies while the regular reading program was conducted independently by the classroom teacher.

The basal reading series (Houghton Mifflin) was the major resource for instruction although supplementary materials were available and frequently used. A district-wide skill mastery checklist was used to track student progress.

The Texas summer program lasted 4 weeks and ran 3 1/2 hours a day. It was staffed by six specialists and six aides. During the first summer, 20 volunteer interns from a nearby university also participated. Students rotated among the following 30-minute activities: (1) directed teaching of reading skills; (2) language experience; (3) listening skills; (4) independent reading; (5) skills reinforcement; (6) library or arts/crafts; and (7) physical education. Special activities such as field trips and entertainment programs were held on Fridays.

Inservice training took three forms. First, the project aides received extensive instruction on the tasks that they were expected to perform. Second, the project school teachers were given 20 hours of training that was designed to answer specific program needs. Third, the project director conducted a training program for parents on ways that they could become involved in the school reading program and help their children.

In conclusion, the major thrust of the Texas project was found in grades 1 and 2 where personnel and materials were concentrated. It was also at those levels that the greatest cooperation between specialists and classroom teachers occurred. In the final project year, deliberate attempts were made to shift more program responsibility back to the classroom teachers.

West Virginia

A rural, mountainous, coal-producing area was the site of the West Virginia Special Emphasis Project. The community was characterized by close-knit family groups who have resided in the area for many generations.

The project school was housed in a new building built by the Federal Government and leased to the county under a flood control relocation program. The comparison school, on the other hand, was in an old building in obvious disrepair. Overcrowding and high student-teacher ratios existed in both schools.

The students in both schools were virtually 100 percent white. Over half of the students received free or reduced-price lunches. Although both schools were eligible for Title I services, no Title I staff served the project school, and only one Title I teacher taught in the comparison school.

The director of the Special Emphasis Project was also the principal of the project school. As a result, he was able to provide strong, onsite leadership. The project was also staffed by one reading specialist, two reading teachers, three aides, and a part-time clerk. The reading specialist worked with grades 1 and 2; one reading teacher instructed students in grades 3 and 4, while the other instructed students in grades 5 and 6. Each specialist/teacher had the assistance of an aide.

All Special Emphasis instruction took place in the reading specialist/teacher's own classroom. The rooms were arranged to accommodate multiple group activities. Each first and second grade class spent 50 minutes daily with the reading specialist. Students were grouped according to skill needs, and the specialist directed her teaching to those needs. The aide conducted reinforcement activities and provided individual help. First- and second-graders received an additional 70 minutes of reading instruction from their classroom teachers. A similar pattern was followed for third- through sixth-graders, with two exceptions: They were selected on the basis of need, and the instructional periods were shorter.

The project's instructional program was based upon the Wisconsin Design tests and management system. Mastery tests were used to determine skill deficiencies. Then, a variety of supplementary materials such as kits, tapes, games, and worksheets were prescribed according to need. Students in both schools used the district-adopted basal reading series (American Book and Houghton Mifflin).

A 4-week summer program was staffed by three reading specialists, seven teachers, and five aides. The 2 1/2 hours of daily classes were devoted almost entirely to reading instruction but also included an exercise period and arts and crafts instruction. The summer program was basically a continuation of the regular school year program, but efforts were made to integrate the teaching of reading into the arts and crafts classes. Field trips were taken on Fridays.

The inservice training sessions were conducted by an outside consultant, and teachers were awarded academic credit for participating. Training was practical and involved such activities as developing instructional materials.

The West Virginia project complied with a diagnostic-prescriptive instructional approach by using a highly structured skills management system. The major drawback, from an evaluation standpoint, was the lack of comparability between the two schools.

## V. OVERALL SUMMARY

The Special Emphasis Project was a large scale project directed at preventing and correcting reading difficulties among elementary school-age children. Funded under the Title VII National Reading Improvement Act, the project lasted 3 years, from 1976 to 1979. The underlying rationale was that intensive reading instruction programs, introduced at an early age, can change the patterns of reading achievement of students in schools having large numbers of students reading 1 or more years below grade level.

The USOE specified a number of provisions, at the outset, that were to guide the development of Special Emphasis programs. Notable among these were: (1) the use of reading specialists; (2) increased time for reading instruction; (3) a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to instruction; (4) an intensive summer reading program; (5) broad-based planning; and (6) parent involvement.

Seven school districts, located in different parts of the country, implemented Special Emphasis programs. Each district designated one school to develop a Special Emphasis program and a comparable school to serve as a comparison school. Although the programs varied in organization, curriculum, and materials used, there were many similarities among programs.

Each program was carefully monitored throughout the course of the project. Evaluation results varied widely among individual

projects. In some, significant differences in reading achievement were found favoring Special Emphasis instruction. However, the overall effects of the project were not as great as originally hoped. Detailed analyses revealed that the effectiveness of the Special Emphasis project was directly related to the extent to which individual school districts complied with the original program provisions.